

## Message Text

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ACTION SP-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 DHA-02 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SS-15 ACDA-07 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00

NEA-10 DLOS-09 /096 W

-----190224Z 061360 /20

R 180845Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7756

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

USIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, SHUM, PINT, PFOR, SN, US

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER LEE SPEAKS OUT ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD  
ASIA AND U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY

REF: SINGAPORE 1999

1. SUMMARY: STRAITS TIMES (ST) ON MAY 17 PRINTED TRANS-  
SCRIPT OF MAY 6 INTERVIEW GIVEN BY PRIME MINISTER LEE TO  
MICHAEL RICHARDSON, SOUTHEAST ASIAN CORRESPONDENT FOR THE MEL-  
BOURNE AGE, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD AND AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL  
REVIEW. RICHARDSON'S QUESTIONS DEALT WITH BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES  
TO WHICH LEE PROVIDED USUAL LENGTHY AND PROVOCATIVE  
RESPONSES. IN ADDITION TO HIS COMMENTS ON ASEAN AND ECONOMIC  
ISSUES (SEPTTEL, LEE ALSO GAVE VIEWS ABOUT U.S. POLICY TOWARD  
ASIA AND ON ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. ST SINGLED-  
OUT LEE'S COMMENTS ON LATTER ISSUE FOR EXTENSIVE AND PROMINENT  
TREATMENT IN STORY APPEARING ON OUTSIDE PAGES OF ITS MAY 17  
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EDITION AND EDITORIALIZED ON SUBJECT IN MAY 18 EDITION. INTER-  
VIEW TRANSCRIPT BEING POUCHED EA/IMS.

END SUMMARY.

2. ASKED IF HE IS CONFIDENT THAT CARTER ADMINISTRATION WILL  
MAINTAIN SUFFICIENT AMERICAN INTEREST IN STABILITY OF AREA,

LEE STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY "A HIGH OFFICIAL OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION (PRESUMABLY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE) THAT THE AMERICAN POSITION IS ONE OF CONTINUING INTERESTS, BUT THEY HAVE NOT YET DEFINED THEIR SPECIFIC POLICIES". LEE NOTED THAT AMERICA IS DIFFERENT AFTER VIETNAM AND WATERGATE, SINCE IT DOES NOT INTEND TO BE INVOLVED IN CONFLICTS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD UNLESS ITS MAJOR STRATEGIC INTERESTS ARE INVOLVED. HENCE, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO AWAIT A DELINEATION OF THESE INTERESTS IN SEA AND THEN ADJUST "OUR POSITIONS AND POLICIES ACCORDINGLY".

3. REFERRING TO A RECENT VOA INTERVIEW IN WHICH ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE HAD INDICATED THAT U.S. CONTRIBUTION TO REGION COULD BE LARGELY OF AN ECONOMIC NATURE, RICHARDSON ASKED IF LEE FELT U.S. IS AWARE THAT ECONOMIC EFFORTS WOULD BE WASTED IF SEA BALANCE OF POWER IS NOT MAINTAINED. LEE SAID SOVIET REACTIONS TO AMERICAN PROPOSALS ON SALT AND INDIAN OCEAN AS WELL AS NEED FOR CONTINUED SECURITY OF SEA ROUTES FROM MIDDLE EAST TO EUROPE AND TO JAPAN WOULD INFLUENCE U.S. PERCEPTION OF ITS STRATEGIC INTERESTS. ACCORDING TO LEE, THERE COULD BE A DEMILITARIZATION OF INDIAN OCEAN AND "A MORE PEACEFUL AND RELAXED WORLD." ALTERNATIVELY, "THE AMERICANS WILL HAVE TO MAKE UP THEIR MINDS WHAT THEY MUST DO TO INSURE THAT THESE SEA ROUTES ARE NOT VULNERABLE TO HARRASSMENT OR INTERDICTION". LEE DID NOT VENTURE AN OPINION AS TO LIKELY OUTCOME.

4. ASKED IF HE IS CONCERNED AT PUBLICITY GIVEN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ASIA IN WESTERN PRESS AND IMPACT THIS COULD HAVE ON U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, LEE REPLIED THAT HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS CONCERNED BECAUSE HE WAS NOT SURE HOW THAT POLICY WOULD BE INTERPRETED AND IMPLEMENTED IN PRACTICE. HOWEVER, LEE APPEARED TO INTIMATE THAT HIS ORIGINAL DOUBTS HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT ASSUAGED BY HOUSE VOTE INDICATING OPPOSITION TO WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS FROM KOREA AND HOLBROOKE'S REQUEST -- FOR STRATEGIC RASONS -- TO THE CONGRESS FOR CONTINUED MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA AND THAILAND.

5. LEE SAID IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT U.S. IS PRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE WITH USSR AND OTHER COMMUNIST POWERS, AND POINTEDLY STATED THAT APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY TO BIG COMMUNIST POWERS AS WELL AS SMALL NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES IS NECESSARY IF IT IS NOT TO BECOME COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. LEE ALSO STRESSED THAT POLICY SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN A FLEXIBLE AND NON-DOGMATIC MANNER, SINCE DIFFERING CONCEPTS OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR MAKE WESTERN STANDARDS INAPPLICABLE TO CULTURES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. ACCORDING TO LEE, JUST AS COMMUNISTS HAVE ACCEPTED FACT THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT ROADS TO SOCIALISM, SO AMERICANS MAY DISCOVER, "OVER THE NEXT 12 TO 18 MONTHS", THAT "THERE MUST BE

MANY AND DIFFERENT ROADS TO A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY".

6. MAY 18 SOLE EDITORIAL IN GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED ST IS DEVOTED TO ELABORATION ON LEE'S CRITIQUE OF U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. EDITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HUMAN RIGHTS IS AN HONORABLE ISSUE AND ONE THAT MAKES FOR GOOD POLITICS IN U.S.; "BUT EMPHASIZING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IS ONE THING, ARTICULATING A POLICY ON THEM IS QUITE ANOTHER; IN FACT IT IS ALL BUT AN IMPOSSIBLE EXERCISE BECAUSE, THE WORLD BEING WHAT IT IS, THE POLICY CAN HAVE NO CONSISTENCY". EDITORIAL OBSERVES THAT CARTER ADMINISTRATION APPEARS NOT "TO HAVE FULLY GRASPED" DISPARITIES FROM COUNTRY-TO-COUNTRY IN HUMAN, CIVIL, AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.

7. EDITORIAL RECOMMENDS THAT, IN ABSENCE OF ANY UNIVERSALLY APPLICABLE STANDARD, EFFORT SHOULD BE PLACED ON CREATING ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO ESTABLISHMENT OF SUITABLE HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS - THAT IS, "A STABLE ECONOMICALLY-SOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SOCIETY, ONE THAT CAN PROVIDE ITS PEOPLE WITH THEIR RIGHTS TO EDUCATION, JOBS, DECENT HOMES, MEDICAL FACILITIES, THE RULE OF LAW, AND FREE SPEECH". EDITORIAL NOTES THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR WEST TO DO MORE TO IMPROVE MATERIAL CONDITIONS IN THIRD WORLD, THEREBY "BRINGING INTO BEING A MORE SOPHISITICATED SOCIETY", THAN CONDEMN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR SHORTCOMINGS IN HUMAN RIGHTS AREA.

8. ANOTHER SHORTCOMING OF AMERICAN APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS, ACCORDING TO EDITORIAL, IS ITS SUBJECTIVE NATURE. WHILE "IT IS POLITICALLY EASY, ALBEIT CORRECT, TO CONDEMN THE WHITE REGIMES IN SOUTHERSN AFRICA AND TO DEMAND RULE BY THE BLACK MAJORITY, THERE ARE BLACK REGIMES THAT WOULD NOT RECOGNIZE A HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY ONLY BE FOLLOWED WHEN IT SUITS A POLITICAL OR STRATEGIC INTEREST"? EDITORIAL CONCLUDES THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER HAD U.S. CONCENTRATED ITS HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORT ON COMMUNIST COUNTRIES "WHERE FREE EXPRESSION AND DISSENT ARE ANATHEMA", SINCE, THIS WOULD HAVE HIGHLIGHTED COMMUNIST THREAT TO ALL OF OUR FREEDOMS AND NOT JUST TO HUMAN RIGHTS.  
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## Message Attributes

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